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homemakers' chat
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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Reserve

Thursday, September 30, 1943.

QUESTION BOX:

How make salt-rising bread?
How use wood in furnace?
How store pumpkins and squash?

ANSWERS FROM:

Scientists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture

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The mail bag today has questions on widely different subjects. One homemaker, who explains that she cannot go to town often to get fresh compressed yeast, asks for directions for making that old-fashioned bread called "salt-rising" bread. Another writer wants to know whether she can use wood as a fuel in an ordinary coal furnace. And there's a question on vegetable storage---this time about storing pumpkin and squash which will soon be ready to bring indoors for the winter. Reminds one of that old poem about "When the frost is on the punkin"...you all know it of course.

Well, let's start off with that question about salt-rising bread, answered by home economists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

Salt-rising bread is not a yeast bread. The home economists explain that housewives used to make this old-fashioned bread when they had no starter or yeast for the other kind of bread. You make a starter from corn meal, which contains certain bacteria that will cause the necessary fermentation.

Salt-rising bread is good for a change, but don't expect it to be as light as bread made with yeast. It's more moist and crumbly. You use a higher temperature in making both the sponge and the dough than you do for making yeast bread.

It takes four separate steps to make salt-rising bread. First you make the corn meal starter, then you make the sponge, third the dough, and then you

bake. To make the starter you need: 1 cup of milk, 1 tablespoon of sugar, 7 tablespoons of white corn meal, and 1 teaspoonful of salt. If you can't get white corn meal, use yellow, but the white gives a better fermentation.

Scald the milk and stir in the sugar, corn meal and salt. Put this mixture in a clean covered jar and place it in a bath of warm water as hot as the hand can bear. Keep the mixture in a warm place such as the back of a coal range at a temperature of 115 degrees from 6 to 7 hours, or until it shows fermentation.

Next, make a sponge. Add 2 cups of all-purpose flour and 2 cups of lukewarm water to the starter, also 2 tablespoons of sugar and 3 tablespoons of melted fat. Beat this sponge thoroughly. Put the jar into the warm water bath at 115 degrees and let the sponge rise until it is very light and full of bubbles.

Now you're ready to make the dough, by adding 8-1/2 cups of sifted all-purpose flour to the sponge. This gives a stiff dough. Knead for 10 or 15 minutes, cut, mold into loaves, place in greased pans, and allow to rise in a fairly warm place (about 100 degrees) until the dough is 2-1/2 times its original bulk. Bake 35 minutes, starting with the oven moderately hot (385 degrees) for 10 minutes, then lowering to 350 degrees to finish.

These proportions of flour, liquid and other materials will yield 3-1/4 pounds of salt-rising bread, or 3 to 4 loaves, depending on the size of your tins.

From salt-rising bread let's turn to using wood as a furnace fuel. Here's the question:

"Could we make a wood fire safely in a coal-burning furnace? We have plenty of firewood on the place and getting coal where we live is more of a problem."

Yes, the Forest Service says, you can burn wood quite safely in an ordinary coal-burning furnace, but not in an oil burner. But you'll have to remove the grate so as to make more combustion space. Firing with wood takes about one

and two-thirds times as much combustion space as firing with coal. Just use the ashpit as a bed for your fire when you have taken the coal grate out. Then you'll have the combined space of the ashpit and fuel box to burn the large volume of combustible gas released from your wood.

Another reason for increasing the space in order to burn wood in the furnace is that wood produces long flames at first. If you build your fire on the grate, these flames will go up the smokepipe, wasting heat, and possibly damaging the smokepipe or chimney.

Wood burns fast with a hot fire. If you plan to burn wood continuously through the winter in your furnace, line the ashpit with firebrick and close any openings below the grate level with fire clay or asbestos cement. Always keep the draft door at the bottom closed, except when you are starting the fire.

You'll find that wood burns cleanly, free from disagreeable dust, and it produces very little smoke or soot or ashes if you burn it properly. A cord of hard wood leaves only about 60 pounds of ashes, while a ton of hard coal makes from 200 to 300 pounds of ashes. Save the wood ashes for fertilizing your garden.

Another point in favor of burning wood is that it begins to burn at a fairly low temperature. So a wood fire is easy to start and easier than a coal fire to keep burning at a low temperature. You can hold a wood fire in the furnance overnight by using the largest chunks of heavy hardwood you have and closing draft dampers tightly.

An now for storing those pumpkins and squashes before the frost nips them. This homemaker asks:

"What is the best way to store pumpkins and squash for the winter?"

The plant scientists answer: Keep pumpkins and squash in a dry, aboveground, frost-proof place. One of the best spots is in the basement near the furnace. Put them in rows on shelves so that they don't touch each other. Keep the temperature about 50 to 60 degrees. Sometimes it's a help to hold the pumpkins and squash at about 80 to 85 degrees for about 2 weeks before storing them. This "cures" them and helps harden the rind of immature specimens. It will also heal mechanical injuries due to handling.

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